

L/O

The Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group Newsletter

October 1991

Issue No. 11

The Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group is open to all interested in Personal Computing, from absolute beginners to experts. You don't need to own a computer to join. Family membership is \$10 per year. For more information, ring (051) 76 6199 BH, 74 1605 AH.

Scrabble for the PC

Fax Modem Review

Multitasking

Desqview

PC using

for the IBM

★ And More...

Input/Output is the publication of the Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group. It is published monthly.

Members are encouraged to contribute material for the Newsletter, in ASCII format, if possible. It can be uploaded to a BBS ((051) 22 2122) or submitted to the editor at 12 Clift St., Traralgon 3844 (Phone 76 1730). "Letters to the Editor" should be posted to the same address.

We accept classified advertisements for inclusion in the classified section. There will be no charge to members for ads of a noncommercial nature. Commercial ads will be accepted for a nominal charge (see Classified page for more information), and the advertiser must state clearly the expected remuneration for any products or services offered. The Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group does not endorse or recommend any products or services included in commercial classified advertisements.

Please note that material published in the Newsletter represents the opinions of the authors, and does not carry the endorsement of the Newsletter Editor or the Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group.



PHONE HELP

Some members of the LVCUG have offered to assist other members with PC related problems over the telephone (evenings, please). They are:

Phil Carter	22 2382
Paul Dzwonkowski	63 1504
Ralph Edgar	74 0987
Graeme Matheson	74 9419
Trevor Smith (Apple)	34 4332
Martin Taylor	76 1730

The Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group is a non-profit organisation formed to promote the usage and understanding of Personal Computers. It is open to all age groups and does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, creed, or national origin.

The Group meets monthly on the last Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at the Traralgon Senior Citizens Club building, corner of Princes Hwy. and Whittaker's Rd. (Victory Park), Traralgon. Meetings are open to the public.

Family membership is \$10 per year. This entitles members to receive the monthly Newsletter by mail, as well as the right to use the Group's "Help Lines". We request a donation of \$2 each meeting per family to help cover costs (venue fees, coffee and tea, etc.).

For more information, ring 74 6199 BH, 76 1730 AH.

The Committee of Management Consists of the Following:

Phil Carter.....	President
Martin Taylor.....	Vice President
Theresa Tate.....	Secretary
Paul Dzwonkowski.....	Asst. Secretary
Graeme Matheson.....	Treasurer
Sheryl Taylor.....	Newsletter Editor
Ross Cheater....	Committee Member
Jenny Poon.....	Committee Member



From The Editor's Desk

For those who are unaware, this month marks the first anniversary of the Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group.

It was one year ago that a small group of local people met at the Traralgon Neighbourhood House to discuss forming a group for computer enthusiasts. Theresa Tate ran the first meeting (very well), I did the second (not so well). When officers were elected, the President (Phil) presided, as he still does.

We started out with 27 or so people crammed into the main room of the Neighbourhood House. Sometimes there were a few more, and other times, the same hard core group of a dozen showed up. It was at those times when I had grave doubts about the viability of this kind of group in a country area.

Little by little, however, word of mouth spread, and there'd be one or two new people at each meeting. It was growing slowly, but steadily. There was some brief chatter on the Committee level regarding the eventual purchase of a PC, to be owned by the group for the Shareware Library, publishing the Newsletter, and also for demos of various programs. It was, however, dismissed as out of hand. We didn't have a large enough membership at that stage, and it didn't look as though we ever would.

Then, Theresa began teaching the DOS classes at Neighbourhood House, and Traralgon Tech put on a Computer Show, allowing us to set up a table at no charge to us. While the Show was a one-shot deal, it introduced the Group to an interested audience, and increased our paid membership by about 30%. The DOS classes, however, are an on-going thing, and they continue to infuse "fresh blood" into the membership.

So, here we are one year later, with over 100 members (still growing) and we, all members of the Group, now own our very own PC. For the most part, it was purchased with funds generated by the Shareware Library, run (very successfully) by Theresa Tate. The PC is kept at my house between meetings, due to lack of space at Theresa's, and also to enable me to do the Newsletter. Marty and I bring the PC in to each meeting and will continue to do so until February, when my tenure as Editor is finished.

We also have a spin-off group, the LVCUG Programming SIG, which is led by Peter Doyle. It meets monthly, and consists of 15 or so people interested in programming, whose "assignment" last month was to write a metric/imperial conversion program in Turbo Pascal.

I guess what I originally intended to say was that the success of this group has exceeded all of my wildest expectations, and I hope you all have been enjoying it as much as I have been.■

Vice President's Report

Last month I almost inadvertently caused the membership some grief with my article on DOS formatting and the LABEL command. You see, it was a last minute article to take up some space on the Newsletter. For those who didn't read it, I suggested that a Volume Label on the fixed disk would help prevent an inadvertent format as the label would have to be entered prior to the format commencing. This is fine for DOS Ver 3.3 users, but for other versions of DOS, it doesn't work, as Theresa pointed out to me when she tried it on one of the Neighborhood House PCs! Luckily nothing was lost. Peter Doyle has suggested some more proof reading be done in future. OK, no problems. Any volunteers?

The New PC

Last week we took possession of the new computer. Sourced through a local seller, it is an IBM AT clone with an 80286 16 Mhz processor, 50 Mb fixed disk and VGA display. It will be housed at the Newsletter editor's house and will be used by Sheryl for newsletter production and Theresa for Shareware distribution. It will also serve other multifunction purposes as the needs arise.

I have spent a couple of days transferring programmes associated with the newsletter from our old NEC over to the new one. The difference in performance is surprising, which is good, as DTP is very graphic orientated, and this creates a need for speed.

PC Swap Meet

On October 20 at the Malvern town hall, a computer swap meet will be held. I will be in Melbourne that weekend so I will drop in for a looksee and to get some ideas for a similar event here in the Valley some time in the future. For those interested in going, it costs about \$2 for entry, and \$4 for a stall if you have stuff to swap or sell. Hope to see some of you there!

Windows 3

Next meeting's theme will be Windows. Although probably mentioned elsewhere, if you are willing to bring your PC along if it has Windows 3 installed, we could show others how it all works. Windows is the operating environment of the future for DOS based PCs, so it pays to keep abreast of the current technology.

I have seen Windows perform on a 20 Mhz Compaq with 8 megabytes of RAM and it FLIES! I have also seen it perform on a 386sx with 2 meg of RAM and it is rather slow. I think 4 meg is the minimum Windows needs to function efficiently, and the cost of memory these days is about \$90 a megabyte of RAM so upgrading is not dear.

See you all at the next meeting.■

- Martin Taylor

Product Review: Maestro XR 9600 Fax/Modem

One of the specials in a recent "Direct Access" (formerly Micro-Ed) mail order catalogue caught my eye. It was for the newly released Maestro 9600 XR fax/modem. At just on \$400 with a few goodies thrown in, I thought it was fairly reasonably priced. The fact that they gave a 30 day "money back if you're not happy with it" offer clinched the deal.

Armed with my trusty visa card, I visited a friend of mine who already owns a fax machine and sent my order through (Maestro offers a further 2% discount if you fax your order). After only about two days, the modem arrived on the doorstep and I wasted little time relegating my trusty 1200 baud Sendata to the cupboard and plugging the new unit in.

My first call was to Phil Carter's "Cyber" bulletin board, and after setting up my Telemate software to the new defaults, I logged on at 2400 baud and proceeded to put it to the test to check the modem's performance. It dealt effortlessly with the occasional line noise I get, not one dropped carrier or retried block on the file transfers. I had no complaints with the 2400 side of things.

The fax section of the modem is a little different, however. When I first opened the manuals that came with it, the first thing to strike my eye was an added sheet from the suppliers. It stated that if I wanted to use the fax capabilities of the modem, I would have to ensure that the serial card I was using was equipped with a "16c450" series chip and not the "8c450" series normally used. Apparently fax transmissions, as well as being sent at the higher speed of 9600 baud, also have a very high number of background commands and error checking routines running simultaneously with the faxed data. In effect, this means that the interface

between the PC and the modem must be capable of very high speed through-put in order to maintain normal fax transmission rates.

A quick look "under the bonnet" of my PC confirmed my suspicions. I had the standard chips installed. A quick call to Tony Dieck at Latrobe Valley Computers in Traralgon solved my problems. He had the high speed chip set on the shelf and would part with them for \$20. They are a direct pin-for-pin replacement with the standard ones, so no further modifications to the serial card are necessary. Problem 1 solved, and thanks to Tony for all his help.

The software supplied with the modem is called "Quicklink II." It's very easy to configure and the well-written manual takes you step-by-step through the set-up procedure, explaining what each option does. It even walks you through your first fax. There are a couple of irritating points, though. One is that, even though the software presents you with a "tree" structure of your disk directories, you still have to type in the complete path from the root directory if you want to pick up a document that's not in it's own QL2FAX directory. This may seem a trifling point but I find it a nuisance, especially when the program allows you to "point and shoot" with the mouse in other sections. Maybe I'm just spoilt by Xtree and the like.

The problems really started with the first fax I sent. It was to the friend whose machine I used to send the order. The modem dialled the number, established contact with the fax and commenced sending the first page. At the end of page one, instead of sending the next page, it paused for a second or two, then abruptly logged off, returning an error message "End of Page Not Received" then another one, "No EOT (End Of Transmission)

Received." Assuming that I had set one of the parameters wrongly, I went back over all the settings, this time reading the book carefully as I went. (when all else fails, read the manual.) All seemed as it should, so I tried again, but with the same result. A phone call to my friend revealed that the only thing happening at his end was that his fax machine was feeding about 2" of paper out then the line was going dead. Repeated attempts with different settings only served to increase my phone bill and incurred a threat from my friend that, if this kept up, I would get a bill for a roll of fax paper.

I temporarily gave up on the fax part of the modem and logged on to Phil's board again to ask for any advice that other users may have to offer. Phil answered my plea for help and said he would drop around when in Traralgon and see if we could improve on my results so far. I gratefully accepted his offer as I had run out of ideas myself.

Phil duly arrived on my doorstep armed with the software that was supplied with his internal fax/modem card. We installed it on my PC and tried again. This time the results were different. The software didn't even recognise my modem as having fax capabilities. It kept on telling us "THIS IS NOT A FAX/MODEM." Back to square one. Phil then suggested that we try to send a fax to his machine at work. The phone bill was already growing to frightening proportions so I couldn't see why I shouldn't waste one more phone call. We uninstalled his software and ran Quicklink again. SUCCESS... The modem worked perfectly. It logged on, got a response from the receiving end, sent the two pages of data and logged off without incident. After sitting in silence for a few seconds, we came to the conclusion that the

problem wasn't with the Maestro after all, but with my friend's "Panafax" machine at the other end. A phone call to my friend to inform him of the results did nothing for his sense of humour, and he tipped a bucket on mine when he told me that I was the only person to have trouble in the 18 months or so that he had used the machine. What this appeared to indicate was that there were machines in use that my fax/modem just wouldn't talk to. Phil said that he would go home and set up his fax card so I could attempt to send him a test document.

At the appointed time I set Quicklink in motion and sat back to observe the proceedings. I didn't have long to wait to get results. The whole thing fell in a heap, doing exactly as it had done before. A voice phone call to Phil confirmed the worst. It was doing the same to his machine as it had to the original one. More out of curiosity than anything else, Phil suggested that I set up to receive and he would transmit a document to me. Then I could observe for myself what was happening. We did so and wouldn't you know it, it worked perfectly. A call to the "Panafax" owner got him to send one as well. No problem there, either. Further experimentation led to the discovery that my machine, while receiving everything perfectly, would only successfully transmit to about half the machines I tried. It looked as though the 30 day "money-back-if-you-don't-like-it" guarantee was going to get a try out.

I decided to give the Maestro head office in Sydney a call. I was put through to their technical department where the technicians were very helpful indeed. They suggested that I run my computer in "plain vanilla" mode. That is, no menu system, no TSRs, no device drivers or caches, absolutely nothing in memory that didn't have to be there, and try again. I did so, but with the same

results as before. They then suggested that I fax them so they could see first hand what the problem was. I did as they asked and, wouldn't you know it, the thing worked perfectly. Murphy's law was working well. They then asked for the number of the fax machine that I'd been having trouble with so that they could try that for themselves. I gave it to them and it wasn't long before they rang back to say that they had successfully sent a high resolution graphics fax to my friend. If the transmission was going to fail, it would have done so on that type of document. Without admitting that they were stumped, they said they would have a think about it over lunch and call me back that afternoon.

The technicians from Maestro eventually rang back late in the day and asked what version of ROM I was running in the modem. I was running version 2.0, the current one. They offered to send me version 2.01, the one they were testing at the moment. It wasn't yet available for commercial release but they had given one or two out free of charge to people like myself who were experiencing problems. I thanked them for their trouble and sat back to wait for my updated ROM chips.

After a wait of almost two weeks (Australia Post's fault), I finally received the ROM chip. I plugged it in and dialled my friend's machine once again. I must admit, I wasn't hopeful at all, after so many failures. I was surprised and encouraged however when my PC reported that the fax had been successfully transmitted and acknowledged at the other end. All that remained now was to test that my modem still received, and I would be happy.

I organised for my friend to transmit a document back to me and sat back to watch. Everything seemed to be OK, the document was sent, my end acknowledged the transmission, accepted the data and logged

off, all very nice and polite. All that remained was to print the text out and I would be the happiest man on earth. I instructed the software to print the document. Cover page, OK. Page 1, OK. Page 2, garbage. No problem, we'll try again. Attempt 2, same result. Sinking feeling. Try again using another fax machine, same result. Every fax I received had the whole last page compressed into a line about 2mm thick. At this point, dear readers, the Maestro XR9600 Fax/Data modem was prime candidate for the 1991 modem goal kicking competition.

Numerous cups of coffee and pep talks from sympathetic friends later, I reluctantly decided to persevere with the thing and try a few different configurations. I went back to the "pure vanilla" mode again and started from scratch. BINGO. Success at last. Send, receive, no problems, no hassles. Everything worked as it should. Now it was simply a matter of reinstalling my drivers and TSRs one at a time until I found the offender. It didn't take long at all. SMARTDRIVE was the culprit (this is a disk caching utility that comes with DOS 5). Obviously SMARTDRIVE, QLINK and the updated ROM chip don't get on. The faxed document is received OK by Qlink, but when it tries to write the data to the hard disk for storage, Smartdrive intercepts it and somehow corrupts the last page.

I am now the proud and happy owner of a fully functional fax/data modem that is capable of sending to, and receiving from, every fax machine I have tried to date. I no longer have SMARTDRIVE.SYS in my config file and frankly, I haven't missed it. I'm not sure exactly how much the XR9600 has cost me because I haven't received my latest phone bill yet, but I expect it to be a record. I wouldn't be surprised if Telecom send me a christmas card this year.* - Matho

"Scramble" A Scrabble Clone for the PC

One of the better games to come from Shareware is a game called Scramble. Basically, it is a EGA/VGA game of Scrabble. As usual, it is an American game, but the author, Diana Gruber, created the dictionary with words of both US and English spelling.

The game can use a mouse or keyboard, but I find the mouse easier to use. You can play against other players (why I don't know cos I prefer the board game), or you can play against the computer as I do, if I am alone.

You begin by selecting the "easy" or "hard" mode. Then, you are presented with your tiles. To create a word, you click on the selected letter with the left mouse button and then deposit it over the square you choose. You continue to do this until the word is made, then you click the right mouse button to finish your turn. The computer then totals your letters and posts the current score and the amount the last word was worth. Then, the computer displays its tiles and scans the board while reading its dictionary looking for words. It doesn't play to a strategy, according to the README file, to try and place words over triple word scores or anything like that. In hard mode it looks to maximise its points by mere letter values. In easy mode it looks for the first place to place a word.

Your tiles are maroonish red and its tiles are dark blue. Use of blank tiles is allowed as well.

Your tiles, as displayed on the rack, can be moved about to form words, or whatever combination your letters allow, thus making it easier to form a decent word.

You can undo moves you have made, along with moves the PC makes. However, once you have changed, say, your third last move, the PC will place the same word it had originally. Also, your letters are changed to the letters you had in previous moves.

The dictionary is a compiled data file which the PC reads when either checking your words or looking for words of its own. If you place a word it doesn't know, you get the option of retrieving your tiles for a second go (you don't forfeit a turn like in the real game) or you can add to a personal dictionary.

The game comes with a couple of utility programmes that decompile the data dictionary for editing using a standard editor. Once edited you then recompile it again.

Overall, Scramble is a good game, but it can be slow on older XT's as it "thinks" of a word. The graphics are quite presentable, and the "board" is good. The dictionary needs editing as it has over 33,000 words in it and a lot of them are from dubious sources. One word we edited out was "slitless"...

- Martin Taylor

Scramble is available from the Shareware Library, and costs US \$15 to register.

Multitasking, Desqview and the IBM PC

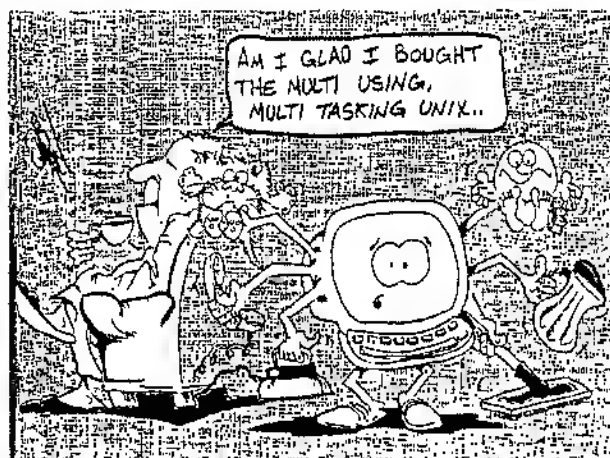
These days we are reading all the hype about Windows 3, multitasking and how wonderful it all is. We also hear the Amiga pundits mutter "so what, we have been properly multitasking for years". Perhaps, but regardless of what anyone says, the humble XT, with its 8088 CPU, can multitask - given the right hardware and software.

One of the members, Ian Lang, purchased an AST RAmPage expanded memory card for his old XT along with Desqview, a multitasking program. He had varying degrees of success with it, but one day we decided to install it on my XT, which ran faster, and try it out.

Now, my PC had access to two telephone lines, so I borrowed a serial card to install a second serial port on the PC. I had two modems at the time, so we setup the RAmPage (with 2 meg of RAM), Desqview, a Bulletin Board System and a communications program. With all the hardware up and running, we ran Desqview. First thing was to open a window, start the BBS, open a second window, and run the comms program. Then I called myself (remember the two phone lines, modems and serial ports?). We started a file transfer going and when that was all stable, we opened a third window, and ran dbase. We opened a fourth window and ran Lotus and started it compiling a spreadsheet. By this time the hard disk was looking like it was about to have a hernia! But we continued regardless. We then opened a fifth window and started playing a game. By this time, the XT cried out "enough!" and the whole mess ground to a halt.

After rebuilding the system, I checked the logs to see how the initial file transfer went between the comms program and the BBS. By all accounts the XT did pretty well, with an average 85% transfer rate, meaning the system was slowed but it did MULTITASK. So, whenever anyone reckons IBMs don't multitask, tell them about this. Better still, come and see me, and I will install the RAmPage on an XT so I can demo it for them.*

- Martin Taylor



OOPS!

In last month's issue, Peter Doyle wrote an excellent article entitled "Stoned", about the Stoned virus. It was meant to contain two examples of Debug displays, one of MS DOS and one of "Stoned".

In error, I printed the "Stoned" example twice. So, to those of you who were utterly confused by the remarkable similarity between the two, I apologise.

Below, you will find the correct print of MS DOS.

2DE0:0000	EB 34 90 4D 53 44 4F 53-33 2E 33 00 02 02 01 00	.4. MSDOS3.3
2DE0:0010	02 70 00 D0 02 FD 02 00-09 00 02 00 00 00 00 00	. p
2DE0:0020	00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00-00 00 00 00 00 00 00 12
2DE0:0030	00 00 00 00 01 00 FA 33-C0 8E D0 BC 00 7C 16 07 3
2DE0:0040	BB 78 00 36 C5 37 1E 56-16 53 BF 2B 7C B9 0B 00	. x . 6 . 7 . V . S +
2DE0:0050	FC AC 26 80 3D 00 74 03-26 8A 05 AA 8A C4 E2 F1	. & . . . s . = . t . & . . .
2DE0:0060	06 1F 89 47 02 C7 07 2B-7C FB CD 13 72 67 A0 10	. . . G . . . + . . . r g . .
2DE0:0070	7C 98 F7 26 16 7C 03 06-1C 7C 03 06 0E 7C A3 3F	. . . & ?

The Attack of the Computer F(r)iends

Hi everyone out there in Computer Land!

I am a new computer user. I got the Newsletter last month, and thought I would write an article for this month's Newsletter. Now, I have never written an article before, so bear with me.

It's a funny story about our computer. Now, I don't know any of the lingo in the computer world. I am still trying to work out how to put the disk in! Anyway, we had our computer about a month when one day, we went shopping.

When we got home, my son got on the computer before me. He did not see that there was a message on the screen before he "booted up", being only 5 years old.

After dinner John (my son) and I had a go on the computer. When I went to Quick Menu, I found a new game. Where did it come from? "Oh, well", I thought, "perhaps I just never noticed it before". I kept wondering WHY I hadn't noticed it before! Well, we went on playing, thinking games appear from inside somewhere.

Later that night I went to my typing tutor and it came up with a completely different beginning. I was shocked! I turned the computer off and on a few times, and went on into the typing tutor. It was a different one! By now, I was starting to get a little worried about the computer. It was a bit scary!

I told my husband that my typing tutor was different and how games had appeared out of nowhere on the computer. Together we tried to work it out. Suddenly, I said, "I'll bet one of our friends came when we weren't home. My husband said, "No, they would have left a message".

We looked for a message everywhere and could not find one. So, I rang my friends. We were having a good chat and I asked, "Did you come to see us today?" They said, "Yes, you were out. So, we left a message on your computer". She had set up a file which contained the message, and when my son booted up, he didn't understand all the words, and pushed a key to get rid of it. Then it was automatically erased!

I told her what had been happening and she laughed and laughed, because I sounded so relieved when I found out it had been her, and not bugs or viruses in the computer.

Well, that's my little story. If any of you out there have had a funny thing happen with your computer, why don't you write a story too? PLEASE, I don't want to be the only silly one out there (HA HA!). I think we should all try to send in a story. It will help the Newsletter. If I can do it, anyone can. Oh yes, I forgot - it has took me five weeks before I put a disk into the computer. I kept looking at the disk and the hole in the computer that the disk goes in, and one day, I finally put one in! Then we went to see my friends, and she told me what to do next.

Well, I won't say any more. I hope I have not bored you all in computer land!■

- Jean Oram

Classifieds

The Latrobe Valley Computer Users Group does not condone the unauthorised sale or exchange in any manner of commercial software. Only public domain and shareware may be freely exchanged within the group.

Non-commercial ads are free to members. For commercial ads, a \$4 charge per 1/6 page per issue applies. To place an ad, ring (051) 76 1730.

👉 For Sale 👈

Contemporary pine computer desk. Has drawers and monitor shelf. \$120. Ph 74-9419.

AST RAMpage expanded memory card for IBM XT and compatibles. Comes with 256k, expandable to 2 megs. Also, Desqview multitasking software and AST expanded memory utilities and all manuals. \$150 o.n.o. Phone Ian at (051) 92 4289.

Netcomm 1234SA Smart Modem 2400/1200 1200/75 (Discovery). Auto dial, auto answer, auto ranging. Tone and pulse dialling. Comes with manuals, software and cables. \$375 o.n.o. Phone 76-1730.

Mario Andretti's Racing Challenge. VGA only, supports Adlib, Sound Blaster and MT 32. \$60. Phone Kris at 76-1737.

Sendata 1200 Auto Modem. 1200, 1200/75, 300 baud. Auto Dial, Auto Answer. Comes with communications software, manuals, and cables to suit IBM. \$150. Phone 74-9419.



These kidnappers are clever, l'utenant. Look at this ransom note, the way they got the text to wrap around the victim's photograph. And the fonts! They must be creating their own; must be over 15 typefaces here...."

Cyber BBS

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- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
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CALL (051) 22 2122 24 Hours

Our next meeting is scheduled for 29 October, 7:30 p.m.